

Halo: The Fast Moving Summer

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Category: Halo

Genre: Adventure, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2013-07-22 02:30:11

Updated: 2014-01-01 15:23:44

Packaged: 2016-04-27 04:23:12

Rating: T

Chapters: 10

Words: 11,443

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: If the wars of Halo could be represented as seasons, then the Interplanetary Wars can be expressed as a summer heat wave. What was it like back then during the 2100s when humans first conquered the solar system? How did the UNSC rise up? Follow through Terry's eyes as he experiences the largest conflict that has ever taken place up to date in human history.

1. Prologue (Deep In the Rainforest)

Prologue

Amazon Rainforest, Brazil, Earth: June 6__th__ 2162__

I never asked for any of this. It has been 2 years since the official start of this war. But, it has been going on for over 100 years. People are so greedy. We thought we could continue to take away from the Earth without giving back to it. We thought that the purpose of our home was only to provide for us. Yea, people argued against it before the turn of the 21st century, but no one cared. The nations of the world didn't care. All they wanted were resources. When Earth was not enough, they moved on to our moon, to Mars and to the Moons of Jupiter.

"Targets in sight, waiting for your mark."

Now, I'm stuck here with my squad cleaning up a large mess that has finally become too big to conceal from the public. Yes, a squad part of a new generation of soldiers that is tasked with bringing order back to this chaotic civilization. From food to money to land, the people of each faction in this war wanted more for themselves. And now, it is up to violence to settle it.

"Hey, everyone is ready. We're waiting for you."

I aimed my rifle, "This is Smith, take them out."

2. Chapter 1 (Earth 2150)

Chapter 1

New York, USA, Earth: August 6__th__ 2152_

It was a hot day as I prepared to carry parts to my friend's, Claude, father's workplace. He worked at an old fusion reactor facility roughly 38 miles away from the main city. The work is boring but the escape from this city is worth it. The city is a wild place home to over 10 million people. Everyday life seems like an adrenaline as people bolt from vehicle to vehicle or skyscrapers to skyscrapers. It is a city that does not stop to catch a breath. I heaved a big sigh as I packed the last box into the car. Then I hopped in and we were on our way.

"In other news, the Frieden Movement of Io once again demanded for their freedom from the United Nations. The Unified German Republic supports this notion by stating that a state free of the UN control can be of great benefit to both Earth and her colonies." said the news reporter in the television in Claude's car.

"It's always freedom, 'I believe that a free state is a good state so I don't have to listen to no one' and then blame the UN." said Claude's father. "The UN didn't change that much, it is still as weak as my grandpa described it about 100 years ago. When you boys grow up, you will need to become great leaders and change this."

Claude was blasting music through his headset so he probably didn't hear a thing that his father said. I on the other hand silently nodded and stared at the blue sky and green trees in the distance. There wasn't a single cloud in the sky, only planes zipping by every minute or so, but even they seemed slow in this natural environment. It seemed as if the world was at peace.

"Capitalism is a curtain pulled over your eyes to prevent you from seeing the true meanings of living. The Koslovics are here to remove this obstacle and we will bring you all back to the correct path" said Vladimir Koslov on the television.

"Ok, have I had enough of this rebellion" Claude's Dad said in a frustrated tone as he turned off the T.V. "Besides guys, we are here."

We stopped outside a giant facility next to the Hudson River. After some clearance, Claude, his father and I walked into a square office with windows facing outwards to the river.

"Welcome back Mr. Locke, I see you brought your son and Terrence here." said a voice.

"For the millionth time, my name is 'Terry'!" I yelled at the voice.

That's my name, it's short for Terry and everyone prefers Terr over Terry. As for the computer, it is capable of many things and yet it cannot remember that my preferred name is Terry. That's probably because when I first entered the facility, I had to give my full name in order to gain access to the facility.

"Thanks VI, good to be back." Claude's father said back.

VI was the artificial intelligence that ran the fusion facility and was Claude's guardian when he was a child. But you can see this type of A.I anywhere in the city. The scenery across the river was more captivating than this.

"Great view isn't it?" Claude's father mentioned "You know, this whole facility used to be a nuclear fission plant and living quarters such as these that were built next to the reactors were considered ridiculous let alone offices with windows. Now with fusion and running them, the dirty civilization of the old is nothing but a memory."

I was quite amazed at how fast people were capable of turning things around. From my textbook, ever since the completion of the experimental fusion reactor in France during the early 21st century, fusion became viable and spearheaded in clean energy of the future. At first it was supported by coal and oil, but slowly those dirty non renewables began to be phased out of our system. It is safe to say, even with a heavily populated world of over 15 billion people and millions living elsewhere in the solar system, that the worst predictions made on global warming were gone.

"Terr!" Claude called out. He clicked his touchscreen and brought up the news on the main window panel. On the screen was a cracked dome in Europa, one of the moons of Jupiter, with the words "Embassy" printed on it.

"This was the fifth and one of the worst bombing of this year," said the anchor, "The UN-Russian Branch embassy was bombed in these specific locations." a 3D holographic model of the dome popped out of the screen and had red areas. "This catastrophe has left hundreds dead including several ambassadors."

"This act will not be tolerated!" yelled the Russian prime minister in the news, "We understand that the Koslovics are tilted towards the old socialist regime but that does not by all means single out the Russian Federation as the culprit behind their acts. If the Friediens have issues with them then take the fight to them. Do not vent your anger out on our state!"

Claude hit the touchscreen and the display once again revealed the outdoor scenery. "If this problem keeps up our generation might get dragged into this war." He said, "I'd probably move to Mars if this keeps up."

"I don't know Claude," I responded, "This seems more of an interplanetary conflict. Earth and all her colonies will be involved"

"But you won't join in on the fighting right Terr? Terr?"

3. Chapter 2 (A New Horizon)

Chapter 2

_New York, USA, Earth: August 20__th__ 2156_

"This isn't a good idea Terry. We can take loans."

Those were my parents talking to me. I am 17 years old and I cannot afford to go to college for the entire 4 years. Prices have been skyrocketing recently due to inflation as a result of the lack of trade between the colonies and Earth. Well, if you have over 15 billion mouths to feed scattered throughout the solar system, people are most likely going to want to hog food for themselves. The UN kept trying to propose deals with Mars and the Jovian Moons, but like all previous deals, these too were rejected. To make it worse, the bombings on the colonies have intensified and soldiers from both the UN and each nation government are being prepped for transportation. Each government is also contacting their own off world militias stationed in the colonies to be prepared.

Deep in thought, I looked outside from my window at the streets. It was a gloomy grey day with a never ending downpour of rain. Behind me in the darkly lit room were my parents. They were finding every way to desperately change my mind. My Mom was in a teary state. Through each tear she threw suggestions at my Dad on how to keep me from leaving. My Dad bowed his head slightly with his eyes shut, he too was thinking of how to keep me at home. But past that calm face, I knew deep down he too was silently crying. This was indeed a sad day.

"Mom, Dad," I finally said as I stared at the west side express, "I need to go. Loans from the national government aren't going to get me anywhere. Most of the money they get from our taxes is being poured into the military to support large scale mobilization to the colonies. I'm not going to last in college for a semester. We all know finding work is out of the question."

My parents sighed looking at the floor of the apartment. "You know that High Horizon is a naval academy and it will push you to your limits." My Dad said. "I don't even think you're physically fit for such place, let alone the accelerated educational program they put you in."

"I know Dad," I said looking back from the windows. "But they sent me an acceptance letter and the UN is funding it. Besides, the recommendation came to me from someone special." I said holding the approved recommendation letter. "I can't let it go to waste."

As if those words were the final nail to the coffin, my parents silently accepted defeated.

"Well, if this is your path, then take it. I only wish what is best for you." My Dad said in a calm voice.

"You must promise to come back during every break. "My Mom added in, wiping tears from her face. "Even if the school doesn't give you a day off, you must come back!"

I slowly backed away again. I packed my last things from my drawer, a compass, a pair of headphones and a textbook about airplanes, and zipped up my duffle bag.

"Well, it's about time." I said grabbing my giant duffle bag "I have to go to the S.I elevator now. Good bye Mom, Good bye Dad, I promise

I'll back."

The rain lightened up to a drizzle when I walked on to the car of the west side express. The thoughts of coming back were embedded in my head. High Horizon was a large naval academy space station located in Lagrange Point 5. The station makes its own food, water and oxygen making it unnecessary to rely on resupply from Earth. As result of the escalating tensions between the colonies and Earth, admission there was essentially free and open to almost anyone. If you can survive in there, you will have to be subjected to an additional 5 years of active service and 2 years in reserve. Coming home from such a place would definitely be difficult.

"Next stop, Park Hill."

I looked out the window and in front of me was the S.I elevator, a giant space elevator with carbon nanotube wiring at its core connecting a geosynchronous space station to Earth. It's hard to imagine that just over 100 years ago, we had to ride adrenaline pumping rockets into space rather than boring elevators.

I scanned my pass on the turnstile and proceeded into the waiting station. Inside I saw hundreds of people inside. It seemed as if more people were leaving this city than coming in. I looked at my boarding pass and scanned for the gate number.

Suddenly, I was knocked over by 2 duffle bags.

"Sorry about that!" I heard someone say behind me.

I looked up and saw a pale, thin and exhausted 17 year old boy. He fixed his glasses and helped me up as I picked up his bags.

"I'm trying to find waiting room 7 but these bags are too heavy so I tried to find a place to put it down and take a rest."

I looked at all his bags. It seemed as if he's trying to bring his home along with him. I grabbed 1 of his bags and walked with him.

"Thanks," he responded holding out his hand, "By the way, my name is Oliver. Franks, Oliver."

"I'm Terry, but you can call me Terr," I said back shaking his hand. "So you're going to High Horizon?"

We stopped in the waiting room and put our bags down.

"Yea, you too? That's great, what are your reasons?" He asked excitedly.

I linked my touchpad to the holodesk on the chair I sat in.

"I'm kind of in a financial problem, but I got a recommendation letter to the place."

The holodesk glowed and a holographic image showing the schedule of arrivals of ships appeared with the news on the side.

"In other news, due to the increase in hostilities between the

Frieden, Koslovic factions with the national governments of Earth, the UN is stepping in to help resolve the matter. However, some of the national governments are beginning to take actions privately."

"How about you?" I asked. "You don't look like a particular person who should be in the military."

Oliver swiped away the news, and clicked an image of the galaxy.

"I joined so I can travel with low cost." He said, zooming into the solar system. "My family also can't afford many things due to the inflation. I told them that I will solve their problems and perhaps the world problem by enlisting." He flexed his bony arm. "I also wanted to get stronger."

Before I could ask him more questions, the doors to the space elevator opened and the artificial intelligence monitoring our waiting room motioned us to start boarding.

The ascent into space was boring as I predicted. But the view was quite breathtaking. During the initial climb I was able to see the entire city. It was well into the afternoon so the all the lights were lit up. The heart of the city was lit up brightly like miles of fire with several different colors of light flashing simultaneously while the surrounding parks and highways were illuminated with cars and buses. At the middle of ascent, the city disappeared from sight and the rain clouds slowly dissipated replaced by the orange hue of the sun and the planes flying by. When we started to slow down, we reached the low earth orbit part of space. The area was black littered with satellites and space junk floating around. It also had many ships departing and arriving at space stations positioned over other major cities or locations. Below me was the cloud covered surface of the home that I will not see for a long time. I looked with awe at this scenery. Since this was my first time in space, everything was new.

Oliver leaned over towards me and pointed at the top of the glass, "There's the station."

The S.I station was a giant donut shaped space station built around a large fusion reactor with all the space shuttles docked in the middle. The donut shape spun slowly, creating an environment with artificial gravity. The skin of the station was darkly colored, but had some solar panels positioned on it making the station glow in the presence of the sun.

As the elevator slowly came to a halt, we packed our stuff and walked towards the ship docked in gate 3. The atmosphere was hectic; it felt like the first day of school. As I was thinking about what space school will feel like, Oliver dropped his bags again.

"Hey Oliver," I said picking up his bags. "It's good that I met you today. Attending the academy would have been quite lonesome but now I have a familiar face to remember when attending. If they let us, you wanna be roommates?"

Oliver smiled, "Definitely, I could use someone to watch my back. Shake on it?"

I held out my hand, "Sure thing."

4. Chapter 3 (Ready Set)

Chapter 3

_High Horizon, UN, Lagrange 5: September 1__st__ 2156_

"Up recruits!"

We had about 10 hours of sleep, but artificial lighting and gravity made it seem like 2 hours. I lethargically dragged myself out of bed, pulled on the clothing offered by the academy, woke Oliver up and we sprinted down to the mess hall.

The mess hall was a big room with probably hundreds of boys and girls about my age arriving and standing straight in front of the table. Oliver and I found a space for two in the center of the giant crowd and followed suit.

About 10 table lengths away were 11 officers with probably 100 drill instructors standing in front of them. They were well dressed and had medals decorating their chests. Roughly 5 minutes later, the officer who stood at the center walked forward.

"Good morning recruits!" she said in a commanding voice. "I am Colonel Neils, Welcome to your first academic day in High Horizon."

Even at this distance, her voice was loud and clear as it sliced through the silent hall.

"You are here because the United Nation's military forces have decided that you are in some ways qualified to be here in this academy. But to me, you have yet to proven yourselves. We demand for the best because you will not be joining the peacekeeping force. We are training a new group of soldiers, one that is intelligent enough, strong enough and capable of taking the fight to the enemy. A group that directly reports to the UN and is capable to lead soldiers of all nations. While those military recruits on Earth are comfortably 'skeet' shooting in their backyards, you will be training not only in simulated environments but in real ones throughout this solar system."

The thought of training on Mars popped into my head. Climbing up the tops of Mount Olympus and doing tactical dives into any location on Mars will be an astounding experience.

"When space was opened up, the UN had to do all the talking and compromising as it had done before. But empty words mean nothing. With the backing of the Eurasian Union and the North American Union comprised of over 100 nations, we now have the tools and the leadership to make the world listen. It is your duty, all of you, to represent our leadership. To achieve such authority, training is required. Now, practice will begin in 0600 hours, dismissed!"

Everyone silently marched out. Even though I didn't have breakfast yet, I was already full of excitement and energy.

I went back into my dorm with Oliver and in front of us was a hologram with the schedule listed.

Oliver and I cocked our heads in unison at the schedule. The first class began in 1 hour and the last class ended 12 hours later. If the curriculum didn't make your mind numb, the spaces in between classes were filled with training exercises so you will feel the burn literally.

"Well this is what we get for entering this school." I said out loud.

Oliver nodded with a blank expression on his face.

"I should record back a video message to my parents, tell them how I'm doing." Oliver said.

"I'll join you!" I said running after him to the holo desk. Little did I know that this was going to be one of the many letters that I will be sending home.

5. Chapter 4 (Penny for your Thoughts?)

Chapter 4

High Horizon, UN, Lagrange 5: May 6__th__ 2157__

"Hey Mom, hey Dad," I was recording my letter to my family and friends at home. "I'm still surviving in High Horizon. My professor in all fields is still the A.I that I told you about last month. I know it still freaks you out but the A.I is actually quite helpful. Zee, the A.I, is quite knowledgeable and I actually learned quite a lot from her. The academy said that Zee's duplicate program will be following us when we go off world. The training regimen is difficult of course, but it's not impossible. We had a couple of people quitting this academy because they can't keep up with program. Don't worry about me. I'm doing quite well with the people I work and Oliver has my back. Since we were assigned into smaller groups at the beginning of the semester, Oliver and I have been almost the best in every exercise. Instructor Saez said that by next year, a few of the class will be selected for early off world training. That's right, I might have a chance to visit the moon, Mars and perhaps the outer colonies of Jupiter. All I need to do is keep up the good work. Well, Oliver is bugging me as you can see him making faces behind me since he wants to send his message as well to his parents. So, good bye and tell Claude I said hi. I'll be back soon. Love you."

It has been about 8 months into the term. We only have at most a week of free time during the end of the spring semester. It's good to be under the influence of natural gravity for a change and to see all the people that I said good bye to. But I can only stay for 3 days before leaving again for High Horizon. I looked out the window, a circular environment with a giant artificial light acting as a source of energy and light. There were vegetation, trees and even some animals but it seemed like a mock set up of Earth, a stage where we were all performing.

"Hey Terr, I'm done." Oliver yelled.

"Adding on to what you said earlier about going off world for training," he continued "we are most likely to be selected for it. We have almost twice as many points compared to the runner up."

He pulled up the school board and passed me the pad. Both of our individual points were off the chart in our fields of interest and our collaboration in field exercises was excellent as well.

It was getting late into the night. I hit the desk and the overhead light came on. I pulled out my airplanes textbook and flipped to the middle of it.

"Hey Terr, why do you always read that book?" Oliver asked from his bunk. "It's a huge boring textbook, and from what I heard from you, you didn't like working that much."

My eyes lifted from the textbook and met his.

"This textbook means a lot to me. It was a gift from someone close. It is the reason why I got into this academy." I said in a flat tone.

"Well, you never told me about the story behind that textbook." Oliver shot back.

"And I probably never will." I answered and looked back at the textbook.

"Do you ever wonder, if there is life out there?" Oliver asked a few minutes later.

It was obvious that I won't be getting any reading done tonight. I closed the textbook and looked at him.

"Well, we have settled on Mars and Jupiter so of course there's life out there." I remarked.

"No, not us, someone else. Like do you think they too are staring up at the sky and wondering if there are people here?"

"Perhaps, maybe we will meet them one day."

"But first we need to be prepared to go off world. I'm really looking forward to go to Mars. It's sure going to be a new experience and fun for all of us."

6. Chapter 5 (Red Planet Alliance)

Chapter 5

_Gale Base, USA, Mars: July 6__th__ 2158_

"Smith, provide suppressing fire for Red Team!"

1 year ago, Oliver and I got the recommendation to go off world. It's hard to imagine that 2 years ago my family and friends warned me not to sign up for any armed forces when tensions were high between the Friedens and the Koslovics and having all the national governments of

the UN caught in the middle. Yet even now, with rising hostilities in Jupiter, our group is now involved in evacuations on Mars. Several bullets flew by impacting the soft red soil behind me breaking my chain of thought. I aimed my rifle at where the gunshots originated and fired blindly into the brewing sand.

We were evacuating personnel and holding the thin line between the enemy and the evacuation shuttle. One by one I saw my colleagues go down from a barrage of lead. A dust storm began to pick up making visibility in the distance worse. The worst that could happen were happening. Our team couldn't see anything, the survivors were getting picked off one by one and rocks began peppering the shuttle. Our oxygen levels in our suit were running out and the landing site was in no shape or form secure for liftoff.

"Smith! What the hell are you doing? Take cover!"

A shell whizzed over my head and landed about 5 meters from me, it wasn't that big but it was enough to knock me down. A shower of Martian debris fell on top of me. This situation was hopeless, I couldn't hit anything and now I was down to my last mag. Just as I finished my last thought the shuttle behind me was hit by barrage of heavy rounds. One must have struck the fuel tank since it suddenly went up in flames and a mushroom shaped cloud formed from its hull.

"Simulation terminate!"

In an instant, the shuttle disappeared and the flames surrounding it were gone. The winds also died down revealing the opposing team's position. A tall serious looking person stood up from the distance and walked towards us.

"Alright recruits helmets off, the area is re pressurized." He said in a hoarse voice.

He clicked a few buttons on his arm pad and the suits, worn by my team mates that were hit with training rounds were unlocked. They shakily stood up straight and removed their helmet.

"That was the most atrocious evacuation mission I have ever laid my eyes upon!" He yelled suddenly with no hoarseness in his throat.

"What part of evacuate did you not understand! Do you want me to web search it for you?!" We all felt very uneasy but dared not to say anything.

"My 102 year old grandpa and his pals from the senior citizen center would have defended this site better than all of you!" he continued, "And you let most of the evacuees get shot, the few who didn't get shot went up in flames with the rest of the ship. Those were drill instructors, I'm sure they're not very pleased to be stunned or falsely laid to rest in this training simulation!"

He took a quick breath after his barrage of criticism, his face red with rage. "Now do you have any suggestions on improving your lame attempts at properly securing an LZ?"

None of us said a word. We were all frozen with thoughts.

"Private Franks, please enlighten us." The instructor suddenly said.

A tall, pale and muscular man took a step forward.

"Sir, the reason why we failed was of our lack of training in this environment." He said.

The instructor turned towards him, his black hair standing up with rage.

"Explain yourself private."

Oliver gulped with uneasiness, "Well, most of our Martian training came from the simulated environment on High Horizon located at Lagrange 5, and we are now thrown into a real Mars scenario fighting against experienced colonial marines in this training simulation. It's tough sir."

"Tough?" the instructor retorted as if that word broke a blood vein in his head. "You think I'm being tough on you soldier? You don't know the meaning of tough! You are a High Horizon Recruit in an accelerated program training to be one of the best! You're not any stupid grunt or fancy flyboy who never stuck their head out of the comfortable little rock known as Earth. When the UN speaks, it is us who leads the way! No matter if it's on Earth, Moon, Mars or even the outer planets! Whenever there's a fight, it's our fight! The UN may be the negotiators but we do the talking! Now private! That was the lamest excuse I have ever heard for the poor performance of this simulation. If the General of this facility heard your excuse, he would have shipped you to Io Station immediately for thinking that I'm being 'tough'. There you may have firsthand experience of bombing, ambushes and your ass getting set on fire. Now, Private Franks, I want you to repay me my 10 minutes in the gravity well, go! We begin evacuation simulation again at 1300 and I'm expecting perfection! Is that clear?!"

"Yes sir!" we all responded in unison.

My team mates and I slumped into the locker rooms and fell flat down. Even though Martian gravity was about 40% of that on Earth, the equipment was killing me. I slowly slumped back into the waiting hall with my team and we all flopped onto the floor. None of us said anything thing for a while, each one of us breathed heavily trying to catch our breath. Several minutes later, Oliver joined us huffing and puffing from the intense run in the gravity well.

"That, was bull." He said in between breaths. "How were we supposed to defend the objective, in a sandstormâ€¦ against veteran colonial marines of Marsâ€¦ armed with combat riflesâ€¦ while those guysâ€¦ are armedâ€¦ with the latest stuff. Might as well use their gear for a less lop sided fight." Oliver plopped down on the ground after finishing his last statement.

"You know that's not going to work. All training supplies have IDs synced to the hand of the user."

We silently sat for another long moment still trying to regain our breath and fathom what happened.

Oliver was right, the veterans who were firing at us were using heavier 7.6 and 9 millimeters rounds rather than our standard 5.56 or 6.8 ones. They also had simulation explosives and snipers as well.

"Hey," a voice said behind Oliver.

It came from the boy who was knocked out during the simulation.

"I think I know a way to use their weapons without the ID." He said brushing back his wet blonde hair. With his other hand he pulled in another person into our small group, this time a girl.

"This is my girlfriend, Mia." He continued as he put an arm around her. The girl nodded at us as she continued to catch her breath. "She's really good with hacking, which was why Sergeant Saez sent her along with us. Get her one of those guns and she will most likely make it usable for us."

There was a chuckle that came about 7 feet away from us. John turned towards the sound and glared at the person.

"You really think those guys will just hand over their weapons like cup of noodles in a convenience store?" The person who chuckled asked.

"I don't see you coming up with any bright ideas." John snapped back. "Maybe you still have some sand in your head."

Suddenly, John's head slammed into the locker behind him. An arm was against his neck as he met face to face with his attacker.

"I didn't hear that quite clearly, do you mind repeating what you said?" The person breathed at John.

Oliver pushed his glasses as he looked at the attacker. "Another girl?" He wondered out loud.

"And apparently with a lot of attitude."

"Hey," Oliver said standing up and putting his hand on the girl's shoulder. "It's useless to be fighting with one another. If don't figure out something, we'll just get messed up out there again."

The girl's fierce personality softened as she released John and slid back to the opposite locker.

"Listen, I still think we should go with that John's idea." I said getting up. "With their weapons, we can even the odds."

"You're going to need back up," the girl said. "I can hit things quick."

"You know you never gave us your name. What makes you think you can just tag along?" John asked in a hoarse voice.

"I'm in this team as well. And my name is Yumiko." She said also standing up. "But you can call me Yumi."

"Well, I proposed this idea and my girlfriend is going to help. Don't leave me out." John said as he stood up with Mia.

"Then it's settled." I responded. "We will grab those weapons and ammo as John suggested and have Mia program them to work for ourselves. Then distribute them evenly to other members."

By now, the other members of our team began to gather around us and started to listen to this plan. Soon, each member began to express his or her opinion about how to make the plan more effective and what he or she was going to do. In the end, many of us nodded in agreement at the finalized plan and soon everybody knew what the plan was. It was payback time.

"Simulation Begin."

We once again began our evacuation simulation. Each small group of the team brought a small group of evacuees and made their way back to the shuttle. Everyone except us, who slowed down to cover the escaping teams and to carry out our part of the plan. About a third of the way to the shuttle, I signaled Mia, John and Yumi to take cover at the sides of the exit and had them aim at the door. Oliver and I proceeded to crouch behind a small dune several feet away from the front of the entrance and waited. As expected the first wave of marines appeared in the hallway, directly in front of us. A hail storm of bullets from both Oliver's and my rifle made its way to the team. With their attention completely on us, the second group of colonial marines who were chasing the evacuees immediately turned their fire and gave chase at us. Just as the last marine of the group left the entrance, John, Mia and Yumi sprayed at them taking out the entire wave. With their gun empty from the small firefight, they grabbed all that they could salvage from the 2 teams and regrouped with us. Together we carried some clips, several heavy rifles, a couple of simulation grenades and a thermal scoped sniper rifle and began sprinting the mile towards the landing zone.

The mile wasn't easy. Even though we took out the first 2 groups of marines more came and began to harass us. With no cover, Mia could not concentrate in hacking into the stolen weapons and we had to resort to our weapons. At relative close quarters, our weapons were just as effective as the colonials' and with the other members of our team backing us up from a distance, we were able to keep the snipers and heavy gunners at bay. But that did not mean we could slack off. For every enemy we took out, it seemed as if 2 more took his place. What made it worse was that the sand storm began to pick up. Soon, our backup will lose visual of their targets and we will once again be fighting the colonials alone. It was unacceptable. We were able to evacuate the "VIPs" and all we had to do was to hold back the colonials for another 10 minutes. Why did everything have to fall apart when we are so close to our goal? My arms and hands ached as bullet shells fell on the ground.

A hand touched my shoulder. I swung over, seeing a giant helmet in front of me. Behind the visor, I could see Yumi panting. In an instant, her eyes pointed towards the landing zone and she sprinted towards the right. It seemed like a slow movie as bullets flew passed her. At some points, I felt like she became a mirage, a spirit conjured by the flying Martian soil. But it was no time to daydream, she was risking her life in order for us to deliver the weapons back to the landing zone. As if the rest of us got the message, Oliver,

John and Mia followed me as we made our way back towards the landing zone.

We huffed and puffed our way back to the landing zone and rejoined the rest of the team who were already dug into the dunes. Mia immediately began hacking into the rifle's identification system. The rest of us took position along the ridge waiting for the evacuation teams to come in and for the opposing team to make their appearance.

It didn't take long for the colonials to show up. In unison, a barrage of bullets began to shower us.

"Remember! 3 round bursts and take turns firing, don't go automatic. Remember your purpose is to harass and have them reveal their positions!" I yelled through the headset.

Mia tossed a converted sniper at Oliver and went on hacking into the other rifles.

Like the previous simulation, we had bullets zipping past our heads but now Oliver answered back with the opposing side's own weapon. However, if the fight continued like this, this battle will definitely be lost.

"Mia, how's the hacking coming? I don't want to get fired at all day." I said tapping her shoulder as I ducked beneath the dune.

I looked around my surrounding. Slowly my team members began getting hit by the bullets from the opposing side. After 3 minutes into the firefight, there were only a dozen of us left who fired blindly into the sandstorm. We lost Yumi, Oliver was running low on sniper ammo and we were trying to hit targets with a pea shooter.

"Sniper! 12 o'clock." Yumi yelled as she suddenly appeared from the sandstorm. A big round flew past her face just as she dived into our position. "Oliver! 12 o'clock, thermals on!" She continued as she threw a giant clip at him.

Oliver, who was buried under 3 inches of Martian soil turned on the thermal scope and fired at the position.

"After we separated, I managed to hit a sniper's nest. Those guys are dug in hard." Yumi said while trying to catch her breath.

Mia rolled over with 2 converted rifles for us to use.

I flipped off the safety and fired. A huge 9 millimeter projectile flew out of the end of the barrel cutting through the storm like a hot knife on butter. Yumi did the same as we began to fight back against the colonials with their own weapons. Slowly, the opposition from the other side of the storm began to die down. The shuttle will not blow up. No more of my team will be getting knocked out. This fight is over. We won.

7. Chapter 6 (Trial by Error)

Chapter 6

_Gale Base, USA, Mars: July 6__th__ 2158_

My team stood at attention as the instructor paced back and forth.

"Explain yourselves, why did you take the marine's weapons?" He yelled at all of us. "You were given your own weapons for a reason! Whose bright idea was this?"

"I take full responsibility sir!" I responded.

"Explain what went through your head private Smith!"

"Well sir," I said. "I was exhausted, tired and red from all the sand from the previous simulation."

"Does it look like I care about your life Smith?! This simulation was designed to show you an impossible scenario, one which you cannot win!"

"I believe there is no such thing as an impossible situation! It was never mentioned that we can't use the marine's weapons. It is fair play and well within the rules."

The instructor looked like he was going to burst but fortunately someone outside the door knocked and beckoned him to go outside. As he walked away, I thought of only one thing. I'm officially screwed. My words didn't convince the instructor so I'm probably going to be sent off of Mars and probably kicked out of the academy. All these years of training, all I have been doing was sending messages back home and occasionally seeing my family face to face for a day before getting shipped off again. I volunteered for this academy but I really miss the normal life I left back home. I wonder if everyone on Mars is wondering the same thing about their home that is several million miles away. Before I could think further, the door in front of me opened with the instructor looking at us. I wonder what he was going to do.

8. Chapter 7 (Long Distant Secret)

Chapter 7

_Zeelach Orbiter Ship 1, UN, En route To Callisto, Jupiter: December 18__th__ 2159_

"Hey Mom, hey Dad. First of all, I just want to wish you guys happy holidays and that I'm sorry I can't be there to celebrate it with you again this year. You know I really miss Mom's cooking during this time of the year. The holiday turkey, the spicy chili, even the rice that she prepares in the pressure cooker, I miss it all."

My heart began to race as I breathed in the artificial atmosphere.

"You know what I'm having right now?" I said in a loud voice. "Oatmeal! That's right, I'm eating dry oatmeal in what I believe is the middle of the afternoon. You know what? I don't even know what time it is since the outside is always pitch black and the lights are always on!"

I heaved out a big sigh and wiped my face with my wrist. I can feel water droplets on my hand. Whether it came from my eyes or from my brow, I did not know.

"I'm sorry," I continued in a calmer voice. "I got a little excited there. The point is I miss you all and the times I spent back home. I miss the weekend fishing and barbeque at Claude's upstate house. I miss the walks I have had along the Hudson River. You know, stuff like that. Sometimes, I wish I can just drop out, but I will be betraying both your trust and hers'." I looked at the airplane textbook laying on the table.

"Anyways, by the time you get this, I should be arriving at my destination. We'll be in touch. Ok, I'm signing off."

In the lowly lit room, I clicked "send" and closed my eyes. It has been more than two years since I last set foot on Earth. The city must have changed a lot but that was the least of my concern. My thoughts drifted towards the people who were closest to me. I wondered what they were doing, how everyone were living out their everyday lives, how Claude's family was doing, if his Dad was still working at the power plant that I used to visit every other weekend during the summer. I then thought about my own family. I wondered how Dad was holding up in his corporation and how Mom was finding ways to support him ever since the company she worked in went bankrupt. They were having a tough time. If only I could go home more often and be helpful.

"That was such a heartwarming letter. Do you want a hug to go with it?" A sarcastic voice said behind me.

My eyes opened, and I swung around. In front of me stood Oliver, whose grin was so big that it looked like he got his birthday present early. Behind him was the rest of my team.

"This room was sealed, how the heck did you all get in?" I asked.

"Well," Mia quietly responded as she stepped forward holding her modified data pad. "I didn't want to disturb you but these guys really wanted to hear your letter and forced me to pick your electronic lock." She stared at the walls of my room avoiding eye contact with me.

"I didn't force you Mia." John said innocently as he dragged her behind him. "Why would you disturb the team leader and blame it on us?"

Team leader. I almost forgot that I was actually in charge of these lovable goons. Last year when I stood at attention in the drill instructor's office, the unknown man who asked him to step outside happened to be a high ranking officer on Gale base. He was observing the "unwinnable" simulation and was impressed with how I had the team fight back with the opposing side's weapons. Even though I explained to him that it was my team's idea, he insisted that my commands kept the team in one piece. In addition, he had the other six groups who also participated in the simulation to be sent with us to the Jovian moons.

John walked over to my desk and picked up my textbook.

"Hey man, do you really like airplanes or something?" He asked.
"Every time I see you alone, you're either watching video messages or reading this."

He started flipping through the giant pages of the textbook.

"What's so special about this? All I see are words, some of them highlighted, but they don't make any sense. Also, why are the words on each page highlighted with different colors? Do you even understand this?"

It felt as if John was never going to shut up. It just went on and on as he poured questions about the item that I held dear to since the beginning of my attendance in this academy. I snatched the textbook away from his hands and carefully placed it into my bag.

"He once told me that the book was from someone special." Oliver said with a mischievous smile. "I think he mentioned that it was from a girl."

John's eyes grew wide open as questions began pouring out of his mouth again. "Whoa, why you holding back on me Terr? Who is this special person? Where is she now? Is she hot?"

I began to feel uneasy from John's barrage of questions. The room felt blurry, and my heart started to race. It was as if I was hit by a simulation bullet and stumbled. My thoughts diverted away from John's curiosity and towards the past. How was she doing? I wondered in my head. It has been a while since I last spoke to her when she had to leave. I hope everything was fine for her.

"Hey Terr are you ignoring me? I'm going to hide your book if you keep ignoring me."

I took a deep breath.

"She's the reason why I'm here." I said in a low voice.

John's amused face was suddenly replaced with curiosity.

"I owe her a lot," I continued in my low voice. "It was because of her that I didn't have to become a liability to my family."

It felt as if I was recording a video message to my family, and John was the computer.

I let out a deep sigh.

"The worst part was I never got to thank her."

The room fell silent. It seemed as if the words froze the very space and time that transcended around us. Even the ship's engine that usually echoed through the halls felt quieter than normal as if the crew wanted to hear my confession.

"So, where's Yumi?" I quickly asked, breaking the silence.

"The usual place." Oliver answered. "I think she wants to be alone

again."

"Again?" I asked.

But this type of behavior was quite normal for her. Ever since we formed our small team on Mars, I noticed that each person was specialized in certain fields that corresponded to their personalities. Oliver was the smart one who could calculate many things quickly in his head. He usually focused on making accurate shots with long range weapons. Mia was the technology geek; she enjoyed figuring out how the smallest things work. When it came to hacking systems or pulling up schematics, she would be the one responsible. John was the curious one, yet his nature is that of an annoyance. He usually noticed the small changes in the surroundings before us and would often act as Oliver's spotter. Then, there was Yumi. She presented herself as the strong silent type. In the simulations, her actions were her words, and the results left people speechless. She was usually the first person who would pounce at the challenge. Whether it was breaching a security door or act as bait to draw away fire from the opposing side, she was there to do it. Outside of training, she would hardly talk and kept her distance from others. If she did communicate, it was succinct. Of all the people in our group, I rarely saw her.

However, that didn't mean we weren't friends. She was still a teammate and a valuable component to our group.

"C'mon guys." I said walking to the door. "Let's pay a little visit to Cargo Bay 3."

The walk was rather long since the cargo areas were about a fourth of a mile away from the passengers' cabins. The hallways were narrow and dimly lit. It felt like walking through the corridors of an old, small apartment building. However, luxury wasn't in the designer's head when this ship was constructed.

Since the establishment of the first colonies on the outer planets, people had a problem in transporting large quantities of supplies to Mars and beyond. Conventional methods of transportation took too long or required too much fuel for travels. To quickly and safely transport people and supplies, engineers constructed giant orbital transports that mimicked the flight path of comets.

Back on High Horizon, Zee, our A.I instructor, described the ship as a giant flying mushroom. The front of the ship was a large circular dish constructed with a specially designed alloy that reflected away solar radiation or sudden flares that the sun emits. Behind the dish was a long cylindrical tube with small segments in between. The living quarters were next to the dish while the cargo bays were located in the rear with the thrusters.

The thrusters were hardly on. During the completion of the ship, it would undergo an initial burn where nearly all of its fuel will be used to set the ship in motion. Then, with only its acceleration and small course adjustments, this massive orbiter speeds up after entering an elliptical flight path between Jupiter and the Sun. When the ship reached its optimal speed, a person can travel from Earth to Jupiter in a little more than a month.

After 14 minutes of traversing through the small corridor, we finally

approached Cargo Bay 3. The inside of the bay was even dimmer than the halls. The bay was large, but it felt packed since most of the space was occupied by giant boxes and equipment. In the back of the room, Yumi sat on top of a stack of boxes. Her silhouette slightly stood out from the rest of the room.

From this distance, I was able to see that her back was turned towards us and her figure was blocking a small blue light. It also seemed as if she was speaking to the light in her native language.

"Hey, Yumi what's up?" I asked her from down below.

She slowly turned around, as the blue light extinguished upon our presence. Her eyes were narrow and out of focus as they looked down at us. She looked like she never slept throughout her whole trip.

Before I could continue to ask my question, John's curiosity overtook him once again, and his mouth began to start spitting out questions.

"So, what was the blue light? Were you talking to it? What language were you speaking, Japanese? What.."

There was an audible swish in the air as a giant duffle bag made its way into John's face. He instantly went down with a thud.

"What do you want?" Yumi asked as she slid down from the top.

It was obvious that she was not in a talkative mood.

"We just wanted to drop by. See how you're doing." Oliver said as he helped John up.

Yumi snickered at the response. The same way she does when she heard something ridiculous. It felt like she did not even recognize us. The silence and the darkness of the cargo bay did not ease the atmosphere either.

"So are you going to tell us about the blue light you were talking to?" John finally asked after being silenced in his previous attempt. He flinched as Yumi picked up her duffle bag on the ground, expecting her to turn the long bag into a battering ram. But, she simply slung it across her shoulder. From her pocket she took out a flat screen that looked similar to the holopads that we used for taking notes and displaying 3D images.

"That blue light came from my GPS." She responded holding out the gadget in question.

There was silence again as we all stared at her, except this time in question.

"Global Positioning System." She said with a frowning look. She probably thought that none of us knew what a GPS was.

"You were talking to a GPS?" Oliver asked raising an eyebrow. "GPS only works on Earth. Even with talking capabilities, they are worthless when you ask them for directions."

Yumi looked a bit hurt by that statement, a very unusual break from her character. It was obvious that there was a great deal behind that piece of machinery.

"Oliver, let her speak. There's probably more to it than just destinations." I gestured to him. I nodded at Yumi to continue.

She brushed her short hair back and looked at the screen.

"It belongs to my family. I took it with me ever since I left home. It has been with me ever since." She paused, most likely having said more than she should have.

Mia was about to ask her to elaborate, but an announcement came online from outside of the bay. We were in range of entering Jupiter's orbital path, and it was time for us to make our way to the shuttles located at the front of the ship. Quickly, we began to exit the cargo bay. As Yumi walked out, I thought about the encounter. There's definitely more to her story. I'll just have to wait until we get to Jupiter.

9. Chapter 8 (Graduation around Jupiter)

Chapter 8

_Cassini Base, UN, Callisto, Jupiter: February 19__th__
2160_

"Alright John, detonate those charges and we will be done with this snatch and grab simulation." I ordered.

"Then it's time for some R and R. Fire in the hole." John replied with a smile as a ripple of explosions echoed from behind us.

It has been around four years since we first entered this academy. I guess you can say it is our senior year. In four months we will be done with our training and finally be admitted into the special fighting force of the U.N. There was no way that they'd say no, we were at the top of our game. Of the seven teams that made it to Cassini base, we were the best. It was amazing how we were able to progress through this training at such a fast pace. In addition to all the combat training, we are able to excel in mathematics, science, strategies, and other fields offered by the academy. Simulations like these were routine and felt more like a regular workout than a test of our survival.

"Package secure. All targets neutralized, they didn't even know what hit them." Mia reported.

She and Oliver slowly walked out of the shadow behind one of the moon's rock. Oliver lowered his modified sniper rifle and brushed off the dirt on his suit. Even up close, I was not able to differentiate his camouflage from the low lit terrain of Callisto's surface.

"You guys should double check some of the craters near the base. You missed like 3 people before entering." He said tapping the sniper rifle.

"Simulation complete. Team Cardinal has completed all categories of this simulation with 100 over 100 and now hold the fastest time of all teams." The A.I monitoring the simulation reported.

Everyone took off their helmets, switched the simulation guns to safety, and walked out of the simulator. I brushed off the layers of moon dust attached to my suit while the rest of the team stretched as we filed our way into the hallway. Like before, we walked with John, Mia and Oliver strolling in the back talking about the fun stuff in the simulation, I stood in the middle listening to what they were saying and watching Yumi who silently kept her distance from us in the front. Unlike Mars base or the Orbiters that transported us here, the lights that lit up the corridors shined like the beacon of a lighthouse. It was necessary since Jupiter was so far away from the sun that it looked and functioned more like a broken down light bulb than a star.

"So why did you let Mia become Oliver's spotter today?" John asked me, breaking off his conversation about the simulation. "You know I'm better with calling out targets than planting explosives.

"He probably felt that you're too nosey and tried to get rid of you with explosives." Oliver playfully sneered, giving John a friendly pat.

I silently laughed, while Yumi chuckled in the front.

Even though the workouts were intense and the time we spend sleeping is all but nonexistent, I took comfort in moments like these. Ever since we moved away from High Academy to Mars, none of us have ever set foot back on Earth, not even on vacations. No matter, my team is my family now.

"Well, I'm happy to call it a day. You guys want to crash in my room for the night?" John asked.

"We have our own rooms John." Oliver replied with a bland face. "Besides, all we ever do at your room is play Chinese Poker with 104 cards."

"Wow party pooper." John was obviously not pleased. After a long day of simulations, I'm sure John wanted to have some fun before going to bed. He turned towards me pleading that I join him, but I too shook my head. All I wanted to do after today was to rest in my bunk. Admitting defeat, John turned to the last two people on our team.

"How about you ladies? Care to join me? I still have soft drinks."

Before Yumi or Mia could respond, the whole corridor turned completely black. Seconds later, one by one, the emergency lights slowly illuminated the hallway with an eerie red.

"Another surprise drill? Right before lights out? Give me a break!" John yelled at the ceiling of the base.

"Shush John. Everyone, helmets on, safeties off, and watch each other's backs." I said loading my weapon with a full mag of simulation rounds.

We must have done this drill at least 14 times since we first arrived on base. The main objective is, and always will be, to secure the command room and establish communication with other bases.

With our guns loaded, we proceeded down the hallway checking every corner. There was no sound except for the contact between our boots and the floor. The atmosphere of this situation made it even more unsettling. The air kept getting cooler, the emergency lights continued to bask the surroundings in red. After several minutes, we came upon the first entry point. It was locked.

Silently, we left it and proceeded to the next door. Several minutes passed before we arrived upon the second entrance, it too was blocked. Again we traversed the halls. While we searched for an open entrance, my mind kept drifting back to my family. I wondered how the people back home were doing, but my training focused me back to the objective.

After 10 minutes of silence and a large number of blocked, we reached the last entry point and as expected the door was shut.

"Crap, the base must be in total lockdown." I thought in my head. "No matter, we are going through this door."

I waved at Mia signaling her to hack into the locked door controls and had everyone else take breaching positions. Beyond this door was the lower deck; above it was the command room. I took a deep breath and looked at Mia. She looked back, her hands danced across her armpad and a blue message that read "Execute" flashed in my helmet's HUD.

My index finger hovered over the enter key on my armpad.

"Alright, let's see what's behind this door."

10. Chapter 9 (Wishing for the Impossible)

Chapter 9

_Queens, USA, Earth: December 28__th__ 2155_

"There's another one. Let's make a wish."

I was looking up at the cold winter night sky watching the clouds move and feeling the few snowflakes falling from them blanketing my face.

"Terry, did you make a wish yet?" A hand shook my shoulders.

I squinted my eyes and made out a small streak of blue flying through the sky. I then turned my head towards the source and looked into the eyes of the person who was asking for my opinion.

"Kassie, that's just an airplane." I whispered. "Wishes only come true if it's a shooting star."

Kassie's head rested back onto the park bench and looked up at the sky.

"You're no fun, Terry" She replied feeling a little depressed.

"If you didn't teach me all about planes and space, I would have gone along with it." I innocently defended myself. "You even underlined the words in your giant textbook that the airplanes' ramjet engine often leaves a blue contrail."

Like our first encounter in the library I messed up once again. She fell silent and looked away from me. But this time was different, we were no longer strangers. We have been in each other's company since the semester started 3 months. Like Claude, she was one of my closest friends. I laid an arm behind her neck.

"Hey, I'm sorry Kassie." I said. "How about this, the next streak of light we see in the sky we make a wish. If it's an airplane, we'll just pretend that it's a shooting star."

We both looked up and waited. Not long after, a blue light streaked across the sky.

"I made my wish." Kassie said with her eyes closed. "How about you Terry?"

I was silent as another blue light flew by, then another and then followed by another.

"Terry?"

_Cassini Base Outskirts, UN, Callisto, Jupiter: February 19__th__
2160_

"Terry!" a voice was blaring in my helmet. I shook my head around watching blue beams of light fly by my face.

"Terr!" I felt a violent shake that made me come to my senses. I looked up and saw Oliver yelling through his visor. A blue light flew past him forcing him to duck. I peeked over the rock and reached backwards for my rifle to return fire but nothing was there. Three flashes of blue skimmed my head.

"Stay down, we got contacts!" Oliver yelled and pulled me back under the rock.

A large round flew past us and impacted a larger rock behind me. It left a large hole spewing out debris upon impact. Since when were live rounds used in simulations?

"Oliver what's going on?" I questioned through my headset.

"When we were breaching the door," Oliver yelled at me loading a new simulation magazine into his rifle. "The electronic signal must have set off a satchel charge that blew the door off. You hit your head when the room got decompressed."

I groaned as I pulled out my pistol and slowly fired at the dark figures to prevent myself from using up the ammunition quickly. Live rounds, electronic satchel charges and open zero oxygen space suppression, the instructors have really outdone themselves in this surprise drill.

"What happened to the rest of the team?" I asked as I loaded in a new magazine.

Oliver collided with me as he dodged another large round.

"Mia and John went to search for an opening in the base away from the fire. Yumi helped me drag you into this crater when you were unconscious."

A dark figure suddenly leapt from one of the shadows and into our presence. We pointed our weapons at the mysterious person but lowered them after seeing the familiar face behind the visor.

"The front entrance is a mess." Yumi said breathing heavily. "I counted around 10 people firing at us. I couldn't get close enough. Their weapons are too powerful."

I could tell that she was frustrated but this was not the time to be agitated. With only 5 minutes of oxygen left in our suits, I needed everyone's cooperation in order to get back in.

"Yumi, Oliver, you two are going to blend in with the moon." I said pushing them into the soft soil. "With the moon's dirt camouflaging your suits and the low light, you guys will be invisible. I will continue to draw their fire to divert their attention away." I continued saying as I took Oliver's side arm's magazine and threw more dirt on top of them. It was just like the simulation earlier where we blended in with the surface. I wiped the gray dirt off of their visors and gave them a light pat on the back. "I'll be joining once you all are safely there."

"Good luck Terr, we'll meet you in less than 3 minutes." Oliver tapped my helmet and began crawling towards the base with Yumi. I breathed in heavily and stood up firing at the first figure I was able to distinguish. My simulation rounds harmlessly bounced off his suit and flew in all directions. He, along with the rest of his companions, ruthlessly fired back forcing me into cover.

The enemies have completely diverted their attention to me, but my only weapon does not even dent their suit. I changed magazines as the rock behind me shook from the force of the bullets impacting it. Quickly, I dove behind a larger rock and fired again attempting to draw more people's attention to my position. Blue lights flew by me as I quickly ducked beneath the rock.

I got up in an attempt to return fire but was immediately met with resistance. Blue lights flashed by where I kneeled, forcing me to lay down again. I tried to peek out from the side but the fire intensified. They knew I was hiding here now and they had no intentions to let me escape. I rolled into the crater behind me as bullets tore through my original cover. I leaned my back against the slope of the crater, pulling out my spent magazine and loading in the last one. Blue lights flew over the top of my head. I breathed slowly as I looked at the blue tracers fly outwards into space. Even though the situation was dire, I could not help but feel nostalgic. The silence of space that accompanied the tracer's brief blue trails reminded me of that snowy night so long ago.

"Terry, did you make a wish yet?" I felt a voice whisper to

me.

"Those aren't shooting stars." I thought to myself. "But after all these years, I could really use a wish." I stared up at one of the blue lights that ricocheted off the crater's edge. "I really want to go home one more time."

"Terr," Oliver's voice crackled in my helmet breaking my train of thought. "We're going to divert their fire, get ready to run."

The bottom left of my HUD flashed in red indicating that I had 1 minute of air left.

"It's no use Oliver," I breathed through the headset. "This is just like the impossible Mars simulation where our rounds do nothing against them. I'm going to call it quits on this one. No way am I going to make it out of this simulation alive if I tried. You guys go on without me, complete the simulation so we can all rest for the night."

A dark figure peered down from the top of the crater, the barrel of his weapon pointed at my head. I silently raised my hands admitting defeat.

"Terr," Oliver continued to say through my headset. "These guys aren't instructors. They don't have UN insignias on their arms. This isn't a simulation, you need toâ€¦"

A bright light flashed in front of me basking my visor in a sharp hue of blue.

End
file.